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Bowdoin

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National Wildlife Refuge

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REFUGE FOR WATERFOWL

Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge lies in the Central Flyway of a great waterfowl migration corridor extending from Canada to Mexico. Approximately 7 miles east of Malta, in Phillips County of north-eastern Montana, Bowdoin serves as a major resting area for waterfowl on their journeys to and from prime nesting areas in Canada. Waterfowl from the Pacific Flyway also use the 15,500-acre refuge.

This region receives only twelve inches of precipitation per year, and ducks, geese, and shorebirds flock to the refuge's ponds and marshes. The Milk River, draining the eastern slopes of the Montana and Alberta Rockies, is the source of the precious water resource for refuge wetlands.

HISTORY

Before the refuge was established, there were no dikes to hold back the spring runoff and the water levels of Bowdoin plummeted each summer. Shallow, stagnant and hot, the small amount of water that remained frequently became infested with disease. Botulism outbreaks killed thousands of birds almost every year.

The refuge was established in 1936 and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service built a system of dikes and ditches to manage the water. In exchange for funds contributed toward the construction of Fresno Dam, the refuge was granted a water right for 3,500 acre-feet annually from the Bureau of Reclamation's Milk River System. This supplemental water, combined with spring runoff, is sufficient during most years to prevent the serious disease problems.

WILDLIFE

During the fall migration, up to 100,000 ducks and geese find safe resting and feeding conditions on the waters and marshes of Bowdoin. Several thousand ducks also nest on the refuge during spring breeding and nesting season. Seven breeding pairs of Canada geese — remnant of the once great flocks of years gone by, were present on the area in 1935. Under careful management, these geese reproduced with heartening success. About 200 broods are now produced in good years.

Black-crowned night heron.

Pelicans are a common sight at Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge. U.S.F.W.S. photo

White pelicans, California gulls, and ring-billed gulls, as well as double-crested cormorants and great blue herons nest on the islands in Lake Bowdoin. Colonies of Franklin's gulls and black-crowned night herons also nest in the marshes. In summer the marshes literally teem with young and adult coots and eared grebes. Sora rails and American bitterns can often be seen or heard throughout the wetlands on summer evenings.

Shorebirds are comon during the summer and also stop at the refuge during migration. Ring-necked pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse and song birds are abundant during the spring, summer, and fall.

Whitetail deer are common residents and mule deer and pronghorns are occasionally seen. Other mammals include whitetail jackrabbits, mountain cottontails, Richardson ground squirrels, coyotes, and striped skunks.

VISITOR OPPORTUNITIES

Refuge roads are open to the public for wildlife observation and photography. The best time to observe the massive migrating flocks of waterfowl is in early fall or late spring. In March and April, nesting flocks of Canada geese and ducks return to the marshes, and the first broods can be seen about the first of May.

Public hunting of waterfowl and upland birds is permitted on a portion of the refuge. All State and Federal hunting regulations apply and some special regulations are also in effect. The designated hunting area is shown on a map available at the refuge office. All hunters are required to check in and out at refuge headquarters.

A self-guided auto tour route encircles Lake Bowdoin and is open to the public except during periods of inclement weather when roads often become impassable. A self-guiding leaflet, which explains various features and management practices of the refuge, is available at the start of the tour. A birdlist containing about 200 species is available at the refuge office.

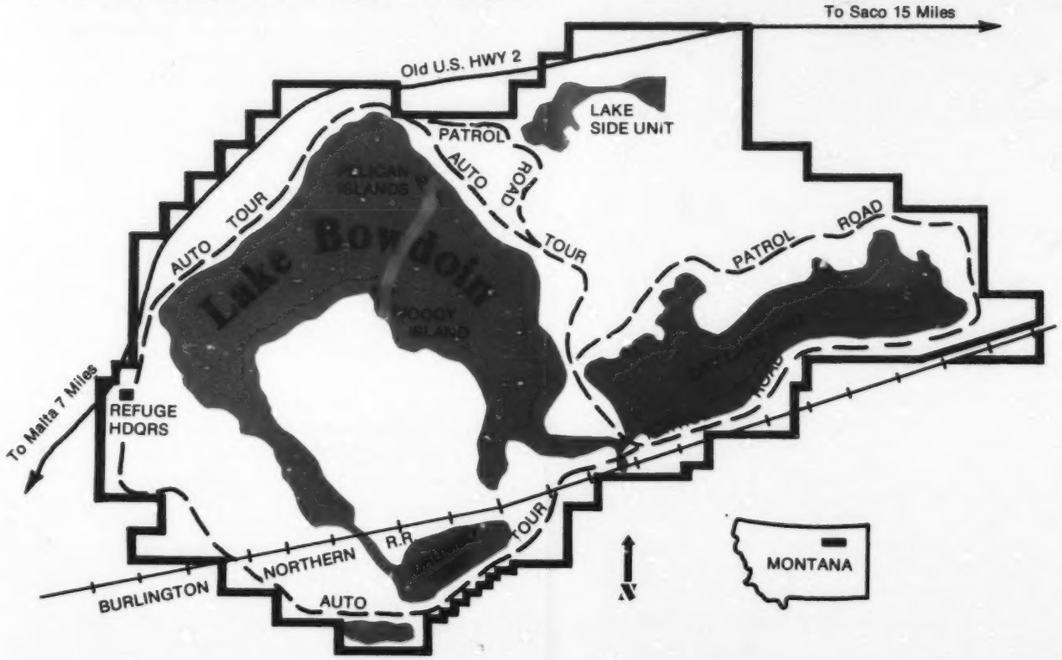
Visitors to the refuge can find campgrounds and motel and hotel facilities located at Malta, or at Nelson Reservoir, located 12 miles to the northeast of the refuge. No camping or fires are permitted on the refuge.

For further information, contact:

Refuge Manager
Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge
Malta, Montana 59538
(406) 654-2863

Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge is one of a system of over 400 refuges administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and dedicated to the preservation and conservation of wildlife. The financial base for this system was firmly established in 1934 through the passage of the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act or "duck stamp act." Funds collected from duck stamp sales have been used to purchase refuge lands that provide habitats necessary to sustain a variety of wildlife for both hunters and nonhunters to enjoy.

Marsh with extensive emergents at mouth canal inlet. U.S.F.W.S. photo.



MAY 1989

RF6-61580-1

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Department of the Interior

*U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1989-673-169